The Plain Truth About CHRISTMAS

The Plain Truth About CHRISTMAS

by Herbert W. Armstrong

This booklet is not to be sold. It is a free educational service in the public interest, published by the Worldwide Church of God.

Printed in the United States of America

1952, 1972, 1974 edition

The original copyright of this edition was claimed by the Worldwide Church of God. However, since Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, the Worldwide Church of God, which he founded to continue his evangelical efforts, has repudiated his writings and has sought to use copyright to prevent the publication of his writings, including this booklet. Therefore, this edition is being re-published ***exactly*** as the original edition authorized by Mr. Armstrong by the Herbert W. Armstrong Library and Archives as a free educational service in the public interest as Mr. Armstrong intended from the beginning. Contrary to popular belief, copyright laws of the United States cannot be used to withhold information from the general public. Therefore, this text is considered public domain. Anyone may re-print this edition as long as Mr. Armstrong's byline is maintained and as long as none of the text is altered, amended or modified in any way.

For more information, please visit www.HerbertWArmstrong.org

Where did the world get Christmas? . . . from the Bible, or paganism?

Here are the astonishing facts which may shock you! Test yourself. How much do you know of the origin of the Christmas tree—of "Santa Claus"—of the mistletoe—of the holly wreath—of the custom of exchanging gifts?

*"**Christmas is** for the children," it is often said. Few people, however, realize where the many customs associated with the Christmas season came from.*

WHEN I was a very little boy, I was taught to hang up my stockings on Christmas eve. When I awakened the next morning, they were filled with small toys and sacks or little boxes of candy and nuts. And beside the mantle, from which my stockings hung, a Christmas tree had suddenly appeared, decorated with shiny tinsel. And on it hung presents. Other presents for us children were piled on the floor underneath. I was told Santa Claus had come down the chimney during the night and left all these things.

But did I question what my parents had told me? Of course not. I accepted it—took it all for granted. Didn't you?

Stop and think a moment! Very few have ever reflected on *why* they believe what they do—*why* they follow the customs they do, or from *where* those customs came. We were born into a world filled with customs. We grew up accepting them without question.

Why? Sheep instinct? Well, not exactly.

But by nature we do tend to follow the crowd, whether right or wrong. Sheep follow others to the slaughter. Humans ought to check up where they are going.

How—*when* did Christmas originate?

Does Christmas *really* celebrate the birthday of Christ? Was Jesus born on December 25th?

Did the original apostles, who knew Jesus personally and were taught by Him, celebrate His birthday on December 25th? Did they celebrate it *at all*?

If Christmas is the chief of the Christian holidays, *why* do so many non-Christians observe it? Do you know?

Why do people exchange presents with family members, friends, relatives, at Christmas time? Was it because the wise men presented gifts to the Christ-child? The answer may surprise you.

Most people have "supposed" a lot of things about Christmas that are not true. But let's quit "supposing" and *get the facts!*

What Encyclopedias Say

The word "Christmas" means "Mass of Christ," or, as it came to be shortened, "Christ-Mass." It came to non-Christians and Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. And where did they get it? NOT from the New Testament—NOT from the Bible—NOT from the original apostles who were personally instructed by Christ—but it gravitated *in the fourth century* into the Roman Church from *paganism*.

Since the celebration of Christmas has come to the world from the Roman Catholic Church, and has no authority but that of the Roman Catholic Church, let us examine the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911 edition, published by that church. Under the heading "Christmas," you will find:

"Christmas was *not* among the earliest festivals of the Church...the first evidence of the feast *is from Egypt*." "*Pagan customs* centering around the January calends gravitated to Christmas."

And in the same encyclopedia, under the heading "Natal Day," we find that the early Catholic father, Origen, acknowledged this truth: "...In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is *only sinners* [like Pharaoh and Herod] who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into *this* world" (emphasis ours).

Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946 edition, has this: "Christmas (i.e., the Mass of Christ).... Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church...."It was not instituted by Christ or the apostles, or by Bible authority. It was picked up afterward from paganism. The *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1944 edition, says: "Christmas....It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth...." (The "Communion," which *is* instituted by New Testament Bible authority, is a memorial of the death of Christ.) "...A feast was established in memory of this event [Christ's birth] *in the fourth century*. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever *on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol*, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed."

Now notice! These recognized historical authorities show Christmas was not observed by Christians for the first two or three hundred years—a period longer than the entire history of the United States as a nation! It got into the Western, or Roman, Church, by the fourth century A.D. It was not until the fifth century that the Roman Church ordered it to be celebrated as an official Christian festival!

Jesus Not Born December 25th

Jesus was not even born in the winter season! When the Christ-child was born "there were in the same country shepherds *abiding* in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). This never could have occurred in Judaea in the month of December. The shepherds always brought their flocks from the mountainsides and fields and corralled them not later than October 15, to protect them from the cold, rainy season that followed that date. Notice that the Bible itself proves, in Song of Solomon 2:11 and Ezra 10:9, 13, that winter was a rainy season not permitting shepherds to abide in open fields at night.

"It was an ancient custom among Jews of those days to send out their sheep to the fields and deserts about the Passover (early spring), and bring them home at commence-

ment of the *first rain*," says the *Adam Clarke Commentary* (Vol. 5, page 370, New York ed.)

Continuing, this authority states: "During the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As...the first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to part of our October and November [begins sometime in *October*], we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole *summer*. And, as these shepherds had not *yet* brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the *25th of December*, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than *September*, as the flocks were still in the fields *by night*. On this very ground, the *nativity* in *December* should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a *chronological fact*...See the quotations from the *Talmudists* in *Lightfoot*."

Any encyclopedia, or any other authority, will tell you that Christ was not born on December 25. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* frankly states this fact.

The exact date of Jesus' birth is entirely unknown, as all authorities acknowledge—though if I had space in this booklet I could show you scriptures which at least strongly indicate it was in the early fall—probably September approximately six months after Passover.

If God had wished us to observe and celebrate Christ's birthday, He would not have so completely hidden the exact date.

How This Pagan Custom Got into the Church

Then how did this pagan custom creep into the Western Christian world?

The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* explains it clearly, in its article on "Christmas": "How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia (Dec. 25) following the Saturnalia (Dec. 17-24), and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the 'new sun'...cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia *were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence*....The pagan

In the Western world *Christmas is the most important religious and commercial season of the year. But exactly what do the various Christmas customs have to do with the birth of Jesus?*

festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia *accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival*."

Remember, the Roman world had been pagan. Prior to the fourth century, Christians were few in number, though increasing, and were persecuted by the government and by pagans. But, with the advent of Constantine as emperor, who made his profession of Christianity in the fourth century, placing Christianity on an equal footing with paganism, people of the Roman world began to accept this now-popular Christianity by the hundreds of thousands.

But remember, these people had grown up in pagan customs, chief of which was this idolatrous festival of December 25th. It was a festival of merrymaking, with its special spirit. They enjoyed it! They didn't want to give it up! Now this same article in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* explains how the recognition by Constantine of Sunday, which had been the day of pagan sun worship, and how the influence of the pagan Manichaeism, which identified the SON of God with the physical SUN, gave these pagans of the fourth century, now turning over wholesale to "Christianity," their excuse for calling their pagan-festival date of December 25th (birthday of the SUN-god), the birthday of the SON of God.

And *that* is how "Christmas" became fastened on our Western world! We may call it by another name, but it's the same old pagan sun-worshipping festival still! The only change is in what we call it! You can *call* a rabbit a "lion," but it's still a rabbit, just the same.

Again from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "Certain Latins, as early as 354, may have transferred the birthday from January 6th to *December 25, which was then a Mithraic feast...or birthday of the unconquered SUN*... The Syrians and Armenians, who clung to January 6th, accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry, contending...that

the feast of December 25th, had been invented by disciples of Cerinthus...."

The Real Origin of Christmas

But if we got Christmas from the Roman Catholics, and they got it from paganism, where did the pagans get it? Where, when, and what was its real origin?

It is a chief custom of the corrupt system denounced all through Bible prophecies and teachings under the name of Babylon. And it started and originated in the original Babylon of ancient Nimrod! Yes, it stems from roots whose beginning was shortly this side of the Flood!

Nimrod, grandson of Ham, son of Noah, was the real founder of the Babylonish system that has gripped the world ever since—the system of organized competition—of man-ruled governments and empires, based upon the competitive and profit-making economic system. Nimrod built the tower of Babel, the original Babylon, ancient Nineveh, and many other cities. He organized this world's first *kingdom*. The name Nimrod, in Hebrew, is derived from "Marad," meaning "he rebelled."

From many ancient writings, considerable is learned of this man, who started the great organized worldly apostasy from God that has dominated this world until now. Nimrod was so evil, it is said he married his own mother, whose name was Semiramis. After Nimrod's untimely death, his so-called mother-wife, Semiramis, propagated the evil doctrine of the survival of Nimrod as a spirit being. She claimed a full-grown evergreen tree sprang overnight from a dead tree stump, which symbolized the springing forth unto new life of the dead Nimrod. On each anniversary of his birth, she claimed, Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it. December 25th was the birthday of Nimrod. This is the real origin of the Christmas tree.

Through her scheming and designing, Semiramis became the Babylonian "Queen of Heaven," and Nimrod, under various names, became the "divine son of heaven." Through the generations, in this idolatrous worship, Nimrod also became the false Messiah, son of Baal the Sun-god. In this false *Babylonish* system, the "Mother and Child" (Semiramis

***Colorful costumes**, blinking lights, decorated trees, the burning of the yule log, the hanging of the mistletoe and holly, the exchanging of gifts, merry-making and song-singing—a description of a modern Christmas?*

Not really. These and other festive customs were commonplace in various nations of Europe around the end of December and the beginning of January centuries before Jesus was born!

and Nimrod reborn) became chief objects of worship. This worship of "Mother and Child" spread over the world. The names varied in different countries and languages. In Egypt it was Isis and Osiris. In Asia, Cybele and Deoius. In pagan Rome, Fortuna and Jupiterpuer. Even in Greece, China, Japan, Tibet is to be found the counterpart of the Madonna, *long before the birth of Christ!*

Thus, during the fourth and fifth centuries, when the pagans of the Roman world were "accepting" the new popular "Christianity" by the hundreds of thousands, carrying their old pagan customs and beliefs along with them, merely cloaking them with Christian-sounding names, the Madonna and "Mother and Child" idea also became popularized, especially at Christmas time. Every Christmas season you'll hear sung and chanted dozens of times the hymn "Silent Night, Holy Night," with its familiar "Mother and Child" theme. We, who have been born in such a babylonish world, reared and steeped in these things all our lives, have been taught to revere these things as holy and sacred. We never questioned to see where they came from—whether they came from the Bible, or from pagan idolatry!

We are shocked to learn the truth—some, unfortunately, take offense at the plain truth! But God commands His faithful ministers, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression!" Shocking as these facts are, they are the plain facts of history and the Bible!

The real origin of Christmas goes back to ancient Babylon. It is bound up in the organized apostasy which has gripped a deceived world these many centuries! In Egypt, it was always believed that the son of Isis (Egyptian name for "Queen of Heaven") was born December 25th. Paganism celebrated this famous birthday over most of the known world for centuries before the birth of Christ.

December 25th is not the birthday of Jesus the true Christ! The apostles and early true Church never celebrated Christ's birthday at *any* time. There is no command or instruction to celebrate it in the Bible—rather, the celebrating of birthdays is a pagan, not a Christian custom, believe it or not!

Thus the ancient idolatrous "Chaldean Mysteries," founded by this wife of Nimrod, have been handed down through the pagan religions under new Christian-sounding names.

Origin of Holly Wreath, Mistletoe, Yule Log

Now where did we get this mistletoe custom? Among the ancient pagans the mistletoe was used at this festival of the winter solstice because it was considered sacred to the sun, because of its supposed miraculous healing power. The pagan custom of kissing under the mistletoe was an early step in the night of revelry and drunken debauchery—celebrating the death of the "old sun" and the birth of the new at the winter solstice. Mistletoe, sacred in pagan festivals, is a parasite!

Holly berries were also considered sacred to the sun-god. The yule log is in reality the "sun log." "Yule" means "wheel," a pagan symbol of the sun. Yet today professing Christians speak of the "sacred yule-tide season"!

Even the lighting of fires and candles as a Christian ceremony is merely a continuation of the pagan custom, encouraging the waning sun-god as he reached the lowest place in the southern skies!

The *Encyclopedia Americana* says: "The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log...are relics of pre-Christian times." Of paganism!

The book *Answers to Questions*, compiled by Frederick J. Haskins, found in public libraries, says: "The use of Christmas wreaths is believed by authorities to be *traceable to the pagan customs* of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which took place at the same time as Christmas. *The Christmas tree is from Egypt*, and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the Christian Era."

Yes, and Even Santa Claus!

But surely dear old Santa Claus is not a creature of pagan birth? But he is, and his real character is not so benevolent and holy as many suppose!

The name "Santa Claus" is a corruption of the name "St. Nicholas," a Roman Catholic bishop who lived in the 5th century. Look in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, volume 19,

pages 648-649, 11th edition, where you'll read: "St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra, a saint honored by the Greeks and Latins on the 6th of December. . . . A legend of his surreptitious bestowal of dowries on the three daughters of an impoverished citizen…is said to have originated the old custom of giving presents in secret on the Eve of St. Nicholas [Dec. 6], subsequently transferred to Christmas day. Hence the association of Christmas with Santa Claus.... "

Through the year, parents punish their children for telling falsehoods. Then, at Christmas time, they themselves tell their little children this "Santa Claus" lie! Is it any wonder many of them, when they grow up and learn the truth, begin to believe God is a myth, too?

One little fellow, sadly disillusioned about "Santa Claus," said to a playmate, "Yes, and I'm going to look into this 'Jesus Christ' business, too!" Is it Christian to teach children myths and falsehoods? God says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness!" It may *seem* right, and be justified by human reason, but God says, "There is a way that *seemeth* right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!" "Old Nick" also is a term for the devil! Is there a connection? Satan appears as an "angel of light," to deceive! (II Cor. 11:14; Rev. 12:9.)

And so when we examine the facts, we are astonished to learn that the practice of observing Christmas is not, after all, a true Christian practice, but a pagan custom—one of the ways of Babylon our people have fallen into!

What the Bible Says About the Christmas Tree

But if the Bible is silent about telling us to observe Christmas, or recording any such observance by the apostles or early true Church, it *does* have something to say about the Christmas tree!

This will come as a real surprise to many. But here it is:

Jeremiah 10:2-6: "Thus saith the Lord, *Learn not the way of the heathen. . . . For the customs of the people are vain*: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not."

There is a perfect description of the Christmas tree, termed by the Eternal as "the way of the heathen—the customs of the people." We are commanded not to learn that way or follow it! It is also viewed in this passage as idolatry. The fifth verse shows that these trees cannot speak—cannot walk—must be carried. "Be not afraid of them; for *they* [the trees] cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good." They are not gods to be feared. Some people *mis*read this to make it say there is no harm in having a Christmas tree, but that is not what it says.

Isn't Exchanging Gifts Scriptural?

But when it comes to the most important part of all in this Christmas observance—the Christmas shopping season—the buying and exchanging of gifts—many will exclaim triumphantly, "Well, at least the Bible tells us to do that! Didn't the wise men give gifts when Christ was born?"

Again, we are due for some surprises, when we learn the plain truth. First, let's look at the historic origin of trading gifts back and forth, then see exactly what the Bible *does* say about it.

From the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, volume 12, pages 153-155, we quote: "The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and *must have been adopted by Christians from the Pagans*, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows."

The fact is, this custom fastened upon people of exchanging gifts with friends and relatives at the Christmas season *has not a single trace of Christianity about it*, strange though that may seem! This does not celebrate Christ's birthday nor honor it or Him! Suppose someone you love has a birthday. You want to honor that person on his or her birthday. Would you lavishly buy gifts for *everyone else*, trading gifts back and forth with all your *other* friends and loved ones, but ignore completely any gift for the one whose birthday you are honoring? Rather absurd, when viewed in that light, isn't it?

Yet this is exactly what people the world over are doing! They honor a day that is not Christ's birthday by spending every dime they can scrape together in buying presents to

trade back and forth among friends and relatives. But I can say by years of experience, as I believe most pastors and ministers can say, that when the month of December rolls around, nearly all professing Christians forget to give gifts to Christ and His cause almost altogether! December often is the most difficult month to keep Christ's work from dying! People are too busy trading gifts back and forth among themselves to think of Him and His Work, it seems. Then, in January and even into February it seems they have to catch up from what they spent for Christmas, so they seldom get back to normal in supporting Christ and His Work before March!

Now consider what the Bible says about the wise men giving gifts when Christ was born. It is in Matthew 2:1-11. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born *King of the Jews*?...And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: *and when they had opened their treasures*, they presented unto HIM gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Why Gifts Presented to Christ

Notice, they inquired for the child Jesus, who was born KING of the Jews! Now why did they present gifts to Him? Because it was His birthday? Not at all, because they came several days or weeks after the date of His birth! Was it to set an example for us, today, to trade gifts back and forth among ourselves? No, notice carefully! They did not exchange gifts among themselves, but "they presented unto HIM gifts." They gave their gifts to Christ, not to their friends, relatives, or one another!

Why? Let me quote from the *Adam Clarke Commentary*, volume 5, page 46: "Verse 11. (*They presented unto him gifts*.) The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a *present* in their hands. The custom is often noticed in the Old Testament, and still prevails in the east, and in some of the newly discovered South Sea Islands."

There it is! They were not instituting a new Christian custom of exchanging gifts with friends to honor Christ's birthday. They were following an old and ancient eastern custom of presenting gifts to a king when they came into his presence. They were approaching Him, born KING of the Jews, *in person*. Therefore custom required they present gifts—even as the Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon—even as many people today take a gift along when they visit the White House for an appointment with the President.

No, the custom of trading gifts back and forth does not stem from this scriptural incident at all, but rather, as quoted from history above, it is the *continuance* of an ancient pagan custom. Instead of honoring Christ, it invariably retards His Work, often sets it back, at the Christmas season every year.

Does It Really Honor Christ?

Now come two arguments often used to justify Christmas observance.

1) Many will reason this way: "But, even though the exact date of Jesus' birth is unknown, should we not select *some* date to celebrate as His birthday?" The answer is positively no! Did you not notice the statement quoted from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "Sinners alone, not saints, celebrate their birthdays." The celebration of birthdays is not a Christian, but a pagan custom, observed by sinners!

2) But, many still reason, "Even so—even though Christmas was a pagan custom, honoring the false sun-god, we don't observe it to honor the false god, we observe it to honor Christ."

But how does GOD answer in His Word? "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them [the pagans in their customs]. . . that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Eternal, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods" (Deut. 12:30-31).

God says plainly in His Instruction Book to us, that He will not accept that kind of worship, even though intended in His honor. To Him, He says, it is offering what is *abominable* to Him, and therefore it honors, not Him, but false pagan

gods. GOD says we must not worship Him according to the "dictates of our own conscience"—a term we often hear. But Jesus said plainly, "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). And what is truth? God's Word—the Holy Bible—said Jesus, is truth (John 17:17); and the Bible says God will not accept worship when people take a pagan custom or manner of worship and try to honor Christ with it.

Again, Jesus said: "*In vain* they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Christmas observance is a *tradition of men*, and the commandments of God, as quoted, forbid it. Jesus said, further, "full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

That is precisely what the millions are doing today. They ignore the commandment of God. He commands, regarding taking the customs of the pagans and using them to honor or worship God: "Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God." Still, most people today take that command of God lightly, or as having no validity whatsoever, and follow the tradition of men in observing Christmas.

Make no mistake! God will *allow* you to defy and disobey Him. He will *allow* you to follow the crowd and the traditions of men. He will *allow* you to sin. But He also says there is a day of reckoning coming. As you sow, so shall you reap! Jesus was the *living* Word of God in Person, and the Bible is the *written* Word of God. And we shall be judged, for eternity, by these words! They should not be taken lightly or ignored.

We're in Babylon, and Haven't Known It

Christmas has become a commercial season. It's sponsored, kept alive, by the heaviest retail advertising campaigns of the year. You see a masqueraded "Santa Claus" in many stores. Ads keep us deluded and deceived about the "beautiful Christmas spirit." The newspapers, who sell the ads, print flowery editorials exalting and eulogizing the pagan season, and its "spirit." A gullible people has become so inoculated, many take offense when told the truth. But the "Christmas spirit" is created each year, not to honor Christ, but to sell merchandise! Like all Satan's delusions, it appears as an

"angel of light," is made to appear good. Billions of dollars are spent in this merchandising spree every year, while the cause of Christ must suffer! It's part of the economic system of Babylon!

We have professed to be Christian nations, but we're in Babylon, as Bible prophecy foretold, and we don't know it! "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues"—now soon to fall—is the warning of Revelation 18:4.

This year, instead of gift trading, why not put that money into God's Work?

Only 87½ More Shopping Days til Christ-mas...

But wait a minute! Have you ever stopped to think about *why* we observe such supposedly Christian holidays as Christmas, Easter, etc? Why doesn't the Bible endorse these holidays? And what days *does* it sanction as holy?

You can discover the answers to these questions in a free booklet, *Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days, Which?*

We think you'll find the truth surprising.